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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4430
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2444
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5397
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5592
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7354
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, OCT 27-NOV 2

¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for October 27-November 2, 2007 that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- March of the Landless
- Tehelka Expos of Modi Role in 2002 Gujarat Riots
- Bhutan Takes Out the Trash
- Indian Military to Vacate Schools, Hospitals in Kashmir

March of the Landless

¶2. (U) A 200-mile march by 25,000 landless laborers to draw attention to the need for land ownership rights for the rural poor culminated in New Delhi on October 28. The march, which began in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, was organized by an NGO called Ekta Parishad, which bills itself as a Gandhian organization working to promote community-based governance, local self-reliance and responsible government. Ekta President Raj Gopal addressed the gathering to demand a clear government policy on land utilization, identification of land for redistribution to the landless and assistance for the poor in gaining control over their livelihood resources. The gathering was also addressed by Communist Party of India General Secretary A.B. Bardhan and Congress MP from Madhya Pradesh Jyotiraditya Scindia. Bardhan told the marchers that the Left parties will take this battle forward. Scindia said the Prime Minister was determined to address the problems of the poor and the landless.

¶3. (U) The following day, in direct response to the demands of the marchers, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government announced the formation of a National Land Reforms Council headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. To support the council, a committee on "State Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Task in Land Reforms" will be convened and will be headed by Union Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh of Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal party. The two bodies will conduct field-surveys, investigate issues of land reform and distribution and examine the feasibility of a fast-track court to handle land disputes.

¶4. (U) Comment: The significance of the march does not lie in the size of the gathering. In the Indian context, 25,000 people can be rounded up for marches and rallies at the drop

of a hat. The curious aspect of the march and the October 28-29 Delhi gathering was the response by the UPA government.

It is quite unusual for an Indian government to stand up a national body headed by the Prime Minister so swiftly to examine the demands of any interest group. Second, the Dalits and tribals who marched were mostly from Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa and Bihar, states ruled by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party or its allies. Third, not much is known about the NGO Ekta Parishad and most people we talked to had not heard about it before. The obscure NGO did a very professional job of organizing the march, with detailed plans, including mobile kitchens and ambulances along the march route. There are also rumors that there were in fact less than 10,000 marchers and the numbers were padded by bussing in people from villages on the outskirts of Delhi.

Some observers have suggested that the march may have been surreptitiously sponsored by the Congress Party itself with the hope that it would spawn Dalit and tribal movements against opposition governments in selected non-Congress states. It may also be seen as a vehicle to head off Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's appeal to the poor and the disposed in these states.

Tehelka Expos of Modi Role in 2002 Gujarat Riots

15. (U) Tehelka news magazine's expos last week claiming Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi authorized the 2002 riots in his state is being portrayed in the print and electronic media as a significant factor in the upcoming Gujarat assembly elections. The 102-page cover story, which was accompanied by television footage on at least two Delhi

NEW DELHI 00004855 002 OF 003

channels, features Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) officials in Gujarat as they detail the methods and means of carrying out attacks against Muslims, police involvement in the attacks and meetings in which Modi implicitly approved of the riots and even promised free rein to the rioters for two days.

16. (U) Fallout from the article has included protests against Modi in New Delhi and resignation of the Special Prosecutor of Gujarat, Arvind Pandya, a prominent member of the Nanavati Commission which is investigating the 2002 riots. The Nanavati Commission will now also take the Tehelka feature into account. Information and Broadcasting Minister Priyaranjan Dasmunsi continues to review a two-day blackout of all news channels in Gujarat following Tehelka's revelations.

17. (SBU) This story has once again provided the Gujarat elections with the religious undertones they had in 2002. Opinion is divided on how the Tehelka report will impact the election results. Some analysts believe that repugnance at Modi's role in the gruesome riots will cost him at the polls. The Congress will try to hit Modi hard and repeatedly on his involvement. Outlets such as New Delhi Television (NDTV) are reporting that upcoming rallies in Gujarat led by Sonia Gandhi and calls for Rahul Gandhi to lead the Congress party efforts in the state have taken on a new significance in the wake of Tehelka's investigation. The Gujarat BJP has questioned the veracity of the revelations. They are leaking to the media that the party officials who made these "revelations" were trying to drag Modi down because they were marginalized by him. SMS messages have been sent out to every Gujarat cell phone number, saying (paraphrased): "Breaking the story now is an anti-Gujarat conspiracy. Modi can make Gujarat great if given the helm for five more years. Congress/outsiders/Tehelka do not want that."

18. (SBU) Other observers believe that both Modi and the Congress have an interest in keeping the story alive because it is a net plus for both. For Modi, it strengthens his anti-Muslim, Hindu nationalist credentials with the Hindu majority in the state, consolidates the right wing Hindu

vote, and serves to intimidate the Muslim minority so it does not actively participate in the Gujarat elections. It may well sweep him to yet another decisive election victory. The Gujarat Congress, which does not want a re-polarization along Hindu-Muslim lines, has observed a studious silence about Tehelka revelations. Some pundits believe that the Tehelka story may cost the Congress Party the Gujarat state house, but the loss will be more than compensated for by strengthening of the Congress Party's appeal to the Muslim community around the country in the run up to parliamentary elections. It may also scare away potential BJP allies such as Nitish Kumar in Bihar, Navin Patnaik in Orissa and Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh.

Bhutan Takes Out the Trash

19. (U) In an attempt to combat the growing litter and pollution problems in Thimphu, the Government of Bhutan last week passed the Thimphu Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules and Regulations 2007 law that imposes fines on the burning of waste, urination and defecation, dumping of hazardous waste, and littering within Thimphu city limits. According to press reports, fines range from 100 ngultrums (\$2.25) for littering to 20,000 ngultrums (\$450) for infractions. To enforce the new law, the Thimphu City Corporation has appointed ten environment inspectors who will work six days a week; an additional ten inspectors are expected to be appointed soon. Officials have commented publicly that the city's litter problem has grown exponentially in just the past few years) from eleven metric tons of waste every day in 2002 to 35 metric tons today. Comment: If only India could learn from this example. End comment.

NEW DELHI 00004855 003 OF 003

Indian Military to Vacate Schools, Hospitals in Kashmir

10. (SBU) Senior Indian Ministry of Defense officials pledged on October 28 to fully withdraw all troops from public schools and hospitals in Kashmir by November 30, marking yet another step towards normalcy in the troubled state. Defense spokesman Lieutenant Colonel A.K. Mathur publicly announced over the weekend that the latest repositioning * the Indian military has already withdrawn from 72 public buildings in the past two months * would start immediately and that the Indian military would raise the rent it pays the owners of land it occupies in Kashmir. The decision comes after Defense Minister A.K. Antony's visit to the region over the weekend and rising People's Democratic Party (PDP) demands for troops to withdraw from populated areas. The PDP * which is in a power sharing agreement to run the state * had threatened to topple the state government if its demands were not met, but PDP leader Mufti Mohammed Sayeed welcomed the military's announcement, telling the press that he hoped it would be followed by troop cuts.

11. (SBU) Comment: The repositioning of troops from schools and hospitals is indeed a welcome gesture that will not only benefit the public and its ability to access these key facilities, but is another important step in the Indian military's attempt to win over the hearts and minds of Kashmiris. It is also a temporary political band-aid that brings the ruling Congress Party back from the brink of losing control of a state government at a crucial time when it is trying to bolster its national standing ahead of potential early national elections and quiets the calls for a troop reduction in the state, which senior military leaders have refused to consider. End Comment.

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